

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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O 311620Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9388
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 10720

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, FR
SUBJECT: BARRE GOVERNMENT RESIGNS AND OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER BARRE HAS FORMALLY SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION AND THAT OF HIS GOVERNMENT. GISCARD ACCEPTED THE RESIGNATION WITH A LONG STATEMENT OF APPRECIATION. CONTRARY TO EXPECTATIONS, BARRE WAS NOT IMMEDIATELY RENAMED PENDING A FURTHER MEETING BETWEEN BARRE AND GISCARD AT 1800 TODAY. ACROSS THE RIVER, THE CONTEST BETWEEN EDGAR FAURE AND CHABAN-DELMAS FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAS RESULTED IN A CRISIS WITHIN THE RPR. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT: GISCARD ACCEPTED THE RESIGNATION OF RAYMOND BARRE AND HIS GOVERNMENT DURING A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MARCH 31. BARRE IS TO MEET AGAIN WITH GISCARD AT 1800 THE SAME DAY, AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF GISCARD'S CHOICE OF THE NEW PRIME MINISTER IS EXPECTED IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THAT MEETING.
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BARRE IS THE HEAVY FAVORITE TO HEAD UP HIS THIRD CONSECUTIVE GOVERNMENT. THE NAMING OF THE OTHER MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY TAKE PLACE EARLY IN THE WEEK OF APRIL 3. THIS WILL ALLOW THE NEW PRIME MINISTER THE TIME HE NEEDS TO CONTACT PROSPECTIVE CABINET MEMBERS AND REFLECT ON THE OVERALL COMPOSITION.

2. A DELAY UNTIL TUESDAY (APRIL 4) WOULD ALSO BE CALLED FOR TO AVOID CERTAIN DEPUTIES FROM LOOSING THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE IN THE ASSEMBLY UPON BEING NAMED TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE ELECTION OF THE NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT IS TO TAKE PLACE ON MONDAY (APRIL 3), AND BOTH THE RPR AND UDF WILL WISH TO HAVE ALL THEIR VOTES READY FOR THAT ELECTION (SEE PARA 3 BELOW). ACCORDING TO SPECULATION, MINISTER BONNET OF INTERIOR WILL BE REAPPOINTED TO THE SAME JOB, MINISTERS MONORY, PEYREFITTE AND VEIL ARE ALSO HIGHLY PROBABLE APPOINTEES AS MINISTERS, BUT NOT NECESSARILY TO THE SAME JOBS. EMBOFF HAS BEEN TOLD BY A STAFF AIDE TO MONORY THAT HE HAS NOT YET BEEN CONTACTED. MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS DE GUIRINGAUD IS UNLIKELY TO BE REAPPOINTED, AND JEAN-FRANCOIS DENIAU SEEMS TO HAVE A GOOD SHOT AT THE JOB. IN ANY EVENT, GISCARD IS DUE TO DEPART APRIL 6 FOR COPENHAGEN (EEC SUMMIT), WITH HIS NEW FOREIGN MINISTER, SO THE NEW GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE KNOWN BY THAT TIME. OF EQUAL INTEREST IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH GISCARD/BARRE INTEND TO BRING IN TO THE GOVERNMENT NEW FACES, NOW THAT HE HAS COMPLETED HIS SERIES OF CONSULTATIONS WITH MAJORITY, OPPOSITION AND LABOR LEADERS. IN AN OBVIOUSLY CAREFULLY DRAFTED STATEMENT OF MARCH 31, AN ELYSEE SPOKESMAN STATED THAT "THE PRESIDENT WILL INFORM THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF HIS CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THESE CONVERSATIONS, IN ORDER TO ORIENT ITS ACTIONS IN A DIRECTION WHICH WOULD FAVOR A POLITICAL OPENING, AND

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WHICH WOULD RESPOND TO THE PREOCCUPATIONS WITH JUSTICE AND PROGRESS WHICH HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED TO HIM."

3. RPR: THE RPR HAS SUFFERED ITS FIRST POST-ELECTORAL CRISIS OVER THE INTRA-PARTY STRUGGLE BETWEEN EDGAR FAURE AND JACQUES CHABAN-DELMAS FOR THEIR PARTY'S NOMINATION FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. FAURE WAS SUPPORTED BY CHIRAC AND OBTAINED ABOUT TWO-THIRDS OF THE VOTES OF THE RPR'S 153 DEPUTIES. CHABAN, HOWEVER, REFUSED TO ABIDE BY THE RPR'S DECISION AND WILL TAKE HIS CANDIDACY TO THE FLOOR OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON MONDAY AS AN INDEPENDENT. HE CAN EXPECT TO BE SUPPORTED BY THE MAJORITY OF THE UDF DEPUTIES (IF THIS GROUP DECIDES NOT TO PUT UP ITS OWN CANDIDATE), AND WITH HIS RPR SUPPORT, MAY OUTDISTANCE FAURE IN THE VOTING. CHABAN, WHILE A LONG-TIME GAULLIST AND CLAIMING TO ACT ENTIRELY ON HIS OWN, IS ASSOCIATED IN THE PUBLIC MIND WITH GISCARD, AND A VICTORY BY CHABAN WOULD BE A MAJOR SETBACK FOR CHIRAC. IF THE RPR AND UDF DO NOT RESOLVE THEIR DIFFERENCES ON THE FIRST TWO ROUNDS OF VOTING ON MONDAY(WHERE AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IS NECESSARY), THEY WILL RUN THE RISK OF A SOCIALIST WINNING THE NEEDED PLURALITY ON THE THIRD

VOTE. THE UDF (130 STRONG) HAS NOT YET NAMED A CANDIDATE

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FOR ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT AND IS OBVIOUSLY WAITING FOR THE
CHABAN/FAURE SITUATION TO CLARIFY, BEFORE DECIDING ON
ITS STRATEGY.

4. MARCHSIA AT THE ELYSEE: IN WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN EX-
PECTED TO BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST STORIES OF THE DAY, THE
VISIT OF COMMUNIST LEADER GEORGES MARCHAIS TO THE ELYSEE
WENT RELATIVELY UNNOTICED IN THE EXCITEMENT SURROUNDING
GAULLIST MANEUVERING. FULFILLING THE PCF'S TRADITIONAL
TRIBUNE ROLE AS DEFENDER OF THE WORKING CLASS, MARCHAIS
REITERATED THE WORKERS' PRIORITIES AS CODIFIED IN THE
COMMON PROGRAM (SMIC AT 2400 FRANCS, REDUCING UNEMPLOY-
MENT, ETC.). HE SAID THE NEW MAJORITY GOVERNMENT COULD
NOT BE EXPECTED TO DO ANY BETTER THAN THE OLD ONE IN
RESOLVING SUCH PROBLEMS AND NOTED THAT THE PCF REMAINED
"RESOLUTELY IN THE OPPOSITION" (IN CASE ANYONE NEEDED TO
BE REMINDED).

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5. AS DID MITTERRAND ON MARCH 26, MARCHAIS TOUCHED ON FOREIGN POLICY IN A LESS CONFRONTATIONAL MANNER, UNDERLINING THE "ACTIVE ROLE WHICH FRANCE MUST PLAY IN THE SEARCH FOR DETENTE, FOR PEACE, FOR DISARMAMENT." UNLIKE MITTERRAND, MARCHAIS STAYED CLOSER TO THE COMMON PROGRAM, SAYING THAT THE PCF WOULD "STAY BY THE SIDE OF THOSE WHO SUPPORTED THE COMMON PROGRAM." THE TOTAL PERFORMANCE WAS PREDICTABLE ENOUGH, BUT AS THE FIRST VISIT BY A COMMUNIST LEADER TO THE ELYSEE IN OVER 20 YEARS, IT ATTRACTED SURPRISINGLY LITTLE ATTENTION.
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